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Course Syllabi

Spring 2-1-2018

JRNL 400.01: Ethics and Trends in News Media

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JRNL 400/ETHICS & TRENDS

Spring 2018

Instructor: Dennis Swibold, 243-2230,
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Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays
from 11-12:20 a.m., DAH 210

Office hours: 3:30-4:30, T-Th, or by
appointment

Goals and outcomes

This course aims to help students function ethically and successfully as journalists. By the course's end, successful students should:

- Have a more nuanced understanding of the ethical issues facing the evolving news media, including the need for diversity and inclusion.
- Be able to develop a framework for making ethical decisions.
- Have a deeper awareness of the economic and cultural environments in which journalism operates.

We accomplish those goals by following current and past ethical debates and studying particular cases that reveal how journalists are wrestling with such questions. Specifically, all students will:

- Research and present assigned topics and cases regarding ethics and professional trends.
- Research and write an in-depth research paper about a current ethical topic or professional trend that they chose, with my approval.
- Participate vigorously in constructive class discussions. (I expect you to stake out positions and politely question one another's assertions and



conclusions.) The class will also feature a sprinkling of guests and offer us an opportunity to do some final academic advising for seniors.

- Warning: This course DOES NOT meet the university's general ethics requirement of an ethics course. You'll need an "E" course for that.

Requirements

Attendance and participation

Seminars can't succeed without your involvement, so you're required to *attend every class and participate in every discussion*. Those obligations form big chunk of your grade.

You are allowed two unexcused absences, but never on your presentation day. Doing work for other classes or a job is not an excuse to miss or interrupt this one. Otherwise, if you are ill or in jail, notify me by email or attorney before class begins. Each unexcused absence beyond the two allowed will cost you a letter grade in the attendance category. For the sake of other students, especially presenters, be on time for class.

Otherwise, check the course Moodle page and your official UM email regularly for reading assignments and other communications. You must take the mandatory Senior Survey, which will appear on Moodle at a later date.

Reading

Subscribe to CNN media reporter and critic Brian Stelter's daily "Reliable Sources" email and read it. Doing so will help you keep up with the topics and trends your professional peers are talking about. Much of the class discussion will center on ethical lapses, and here's where you'll find the latest. Expect the occasional quizzes.

Other good sources for research on ethics news media trends include [Journalist's Resource](#) at Harvard's Shorenstein Center, the [Poynter Institute](#) and the Columbia Journalism Review. [Pew's Center's Media & News link](#) has great media research too.

Required text: "The New Ethics of Journalism, " McBride and Rosenstiel, editors. (SAGE)

Ethics presentation

Each of you will be assigned an ethical problem to research and present to the class. You will research the topic, make a 30-minute class presentation and lead the class discussion in a comprehensive discussion of the issue. I'll post a schedule of presentation dates soon.

In the week before your presentation, send me email outlining the main points you'll make intend to make on the topic. Tell me which major sources you intend to use, and also include any major questions you intend to pose to the class. I may suggest additions or subtractions. Watch the Moodle page for more advice on making good presentations.

Research paper

You must send me a written proposal for your research paper via Moodle no later than class time on Sept. 20. The proposal must include the ethical question or professional trend in news media you hope to research and an explanation of why it's a timely subject. The pitch must also include links to preliminary research you've done in choosing the topic and a list of primary and secondary sources you expect to consult in your research. (Please make sure they exist before you cite them. In other words, convince me that the answers are out there.)

The final paper should be at least 2,500 words in length. *It must include your research question, your research method, a thesis, reporting to support the thesis and a conclusion.* It also must include footnotes or endnotes. It must contain original and timely research, not just a rehash of what others have written or said. That means you'll have to include some interviews with sources who have expertise on the subject.

Warning: You may not use J-school profs and other students as sources.

Your paper is a work of critical inquiry and thinking. It must reflect the level of research and writing expected of a senior. And you must be fair. If you criticize people or institutions, you must offer them a chance to respond.

Key deadlines:

- I'll expect a first draft of the research paper in my office and by email by class time on Thursday, Nov 1. This draft will include the introduction (the research question and what makes it compelling, newsworthy, timely, etc.); a description of your method (how you intend to explore this: sources, data, studies you'll use.); a working thesis statement (a good sentence explaining your conclusion so far) and enough of the reporting for me to see that you're on the right track. I expect to see at least 1,000 words in this draft – enough to show me that you're on the right track.
- A hard copy and an email version of the final draft are due in class on Thursday, Dec. 6. The final draft will include entire paper, along with footnotes and endnotes citing your sources. Inserting both is easy in Word. Here's [a good style guide](#) for how to write them.

Grading

I'll grade you on participation, your ethics presentation and your research paper. For the participation grade, I'll take attendance and monitor your contribution to class discussion. You must contribute to class discussions, and your good questions are worth more than your opinions. My grades for the presentation and research paper will be based on the quality of your research and presentation. More about that later.

Here's how I'll calculate a final grade:

- Class participation (attendance, discussion, quizzes), 40 percent
- Class ethics presentation, 20 percent
- Research paper (average of both drafts), 40 percent

Plagiarism, honesty and double-dipping

If you plagiarize, you will get an F for the course, which means you'll have to retake JRNL 400 to graduate. I will be scrutinizing your work, so attribute any instance in which you use someone else's words or ideas. Avoid the temptation by simply using attribution, links or footnotes. Wikipedia is not an acceptable source for attribution, but it could be a great place to find sources. I'll also hold you to UM's [Student Conduct Code](#).

You may not submit any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class. We call that "double dipping." Doing so will result in an "F" for the assignment and perhaps an "F" for the course.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

Students with disabilities can request reasonable program modifications by consulting with the instructor. Disability Services for Students will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process. For more information, visit the [Disability Services](#) site.

More to come

A class-by-class presentation schedule will follow as soon as I've assigned topics to all students.